

Dental Services in Havering

October 2020



What is Healthwatch Havering?

Healthwatch Havering is the local consumer champion for both health and social care in the London Borough of Havering. Our aim is to give local citizens and communities a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are provided for all individuals locally.

We are an independent organisation, established by the Health and Social Care Act 2012, and employ our own staff and involve lay people/volunteers so that we can become the influential and effective voice of the public.

Healthwatch Havering is a Company Limited by Guarantee, managed by three part-time directors, including the Chairman and the Company Secretary, supported by two part-time staff, and by volunteers, both from professional health and social care backgrounds and lay people who have an interest in health or social care issues.

Why is this important to you and your family and friends?

Following the public inquiry into the failings at Mid-Staffordshire Hospital, the Francis report reinforced the importance of the voices of patients and their relatives within the health and social care system.

Healthwatch England is the national organisation which enables the collective views of the people who use NHS and social services to influence national policy, advice and guidance.

Healthwatch Havering is your local organisation, enabling you on behalf of yourself, your family and your friends to ensure views and concerns about the local health and social services are understood.

Your contribution is vital in helping to build a picture of where services are doing well and where they need to be improved. This will help and support the Clinical Commissioning Groups, NHS Services and contractors, and the Local Authority to make sure their services really are designed to meet citizens' needs.

***'You make a living by what you get,
but you make a life by what you give.'***
Winston Churchill

Introduction

Following the lockdown to deal with Covid-19 in March 2020, dental services - both NHS and private - across England were suspended, with only emergency treatments being available, mainly through calls via NHS111. By August, however, the restrictions on dentistry began to be gradually relaxed and routine treatments and dental checks became more widely available (although nowhere near to pre-Covid levels).

Although Healthwatch Havering had hitherto not seen dentistry as a priority for attention, from September a growing number of enquiries from people who had been unable to obtain treatment for non-routine dental conditions through NHS dentists in the borough prompted a survey of dental practices to ascertain whether they were accepting NHS patients, and other relevant issues.

It should be acknowledged that, despite its importance to health and wellbeing, people generally have long viewed dentistry as something of an optional extra to the NHS. Although most people see their dentist regularly for check-ups and minor treatments like fillings, a significant minority do not do so - some people are proud to say that they have not seen a dentist “for years”, often because of a previous bad experience or they are fearful of the sort of treatments for which dentists are responsible. The absence of dental services for much of the initial lockdown period aggravated this position.

Some of the enquiries made to Healthwatch Havering suggested that some people were unaware that (with the exception of people on certain social security benefits) all dental treatments provided through the NHS bear charges - as at 1 October 2020 these were £22.70 for emergency treatment or routine treatments, £62.10 for fillings, root canal treatments or extractions, and £269.30 for treatments such as crowns, dentures and bridge work. Charges for private dentistry are, of course, unlimited and vary widely from practice to practice.

It is well-documented that many dentists either do not offer treatment thorough the NHS or primarily offer private treatments as a matter of practice policy.

Taking on new NHS patients

This prompted Healthwatch Havering to carry out a short survey of all dental practices in the borough - 45 are registered by the CQC. It should be added that people are not obliged to use a dental practice within their borough of residence: they are free to use the practice of their choice. Thus, the availability of dental practices in the borough is not of itself fully indicative of the level of dental services accessible by residents, but equally people from elsewhere may be patients of practices in the borough.

Members of Healthwatch Havering telephoned all the registered practices to ask them the survey questions; 27 practices responded. Of those that did respond, only four told us that they were accepting new NHS patients at the time (Note: this does not mean that those which were not accepting new patients would not offer NHS treatments, just that they were treating existing patients only).

Of those not currently accepting new NHS patients, two told our members that they were likely to start accepting new NHS patients by no later than December 2021 and one later than then. The remainder did not respond to that question or said that they would not be accepting new NHS patients at all.

The results of the survey are set out in full in the Appendix to this report.

Facilities and services at dental practices

The survey contained several questions about facilities and services for patients.

Waiting time

The waiting time for an appointment for routine treatment, perhaps unsurprisingly, varied greatly across the practices surveyed. Responses varied from one week to two months, with one practice telling the survey that they would offer appointments only “once the backlog has gone”, another seeing patients “as required” according to a treatment plan, and one saying honestly that they “Cannot say”. For at least one practice, no routine appointments were available.

Dealing with emergencies

Most practices were fitting emergency patients into the nearest available appointment slot or prioritising according to need. Just under a third said that they would refer emergency patients to another practice.

Covid-19 precautions

All practices told our survey that their staff wore Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and required patients to wear masks when not undergoing treatment; nearly all said that the room was cleaned thoroughly between patients. About a quarter of practices made a charge to patients for the use of PPE.

Six practices commented on screening patients for Covid-19 infection before seeing them, saying that they were reliant on patients being truthful in their responses to the screening questions.

Conclusion

It is worrying that fewer than 10% of dental practices in Havering seem willing to accept new NHS patients at present.

Although the number of dentists offering NHS services has been falling nationally for several years, the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown has brought the lack of NHS cover to the fore. Those patients who had not accessed dental treatment for some time suddenly found themselves unable to do so and with little, if any, choice as to where they could do so when it became available. Added to that, their lack of recent experience of NHS dental services meant that they were unfamiliar with the current charging structure and unaware either that charges were payable or of their extent.

Obviously, it is not within Healthwatch's remit to encourage those dental practices who do not wish to, to accept NHS patients. The main reason cited for dentists' reluctance to accept NHS patients is that they find the terms of the NHS dentistry contract too onerous to make it worth their while acceding to it.

Given the importance of good dental health to an individual's wellbeing, it is to be hoped that NHS England will find a way to devise an improved contract offer to incentivise more dentists to offer NHS dentistry.

Healthwatch Havering thanks all practices who were contacted for the survey for their help and co-operation, which is much appreciated.

Disclaimer

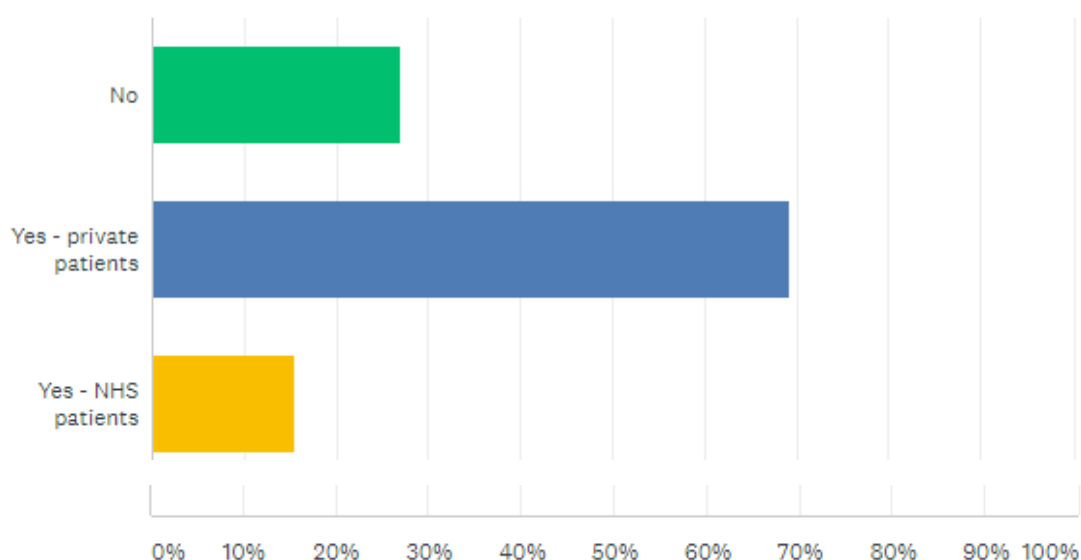
This report relates to the survey carried out during October 2020 and is representative only of those practices that participated.

Appendix

Survey findings: details

The survey asked the following quantitative questions. Not every practice contacted felt able to answer every question, so some replies are derived from fewer than 27 practices:

1 Are you accepting new patients?



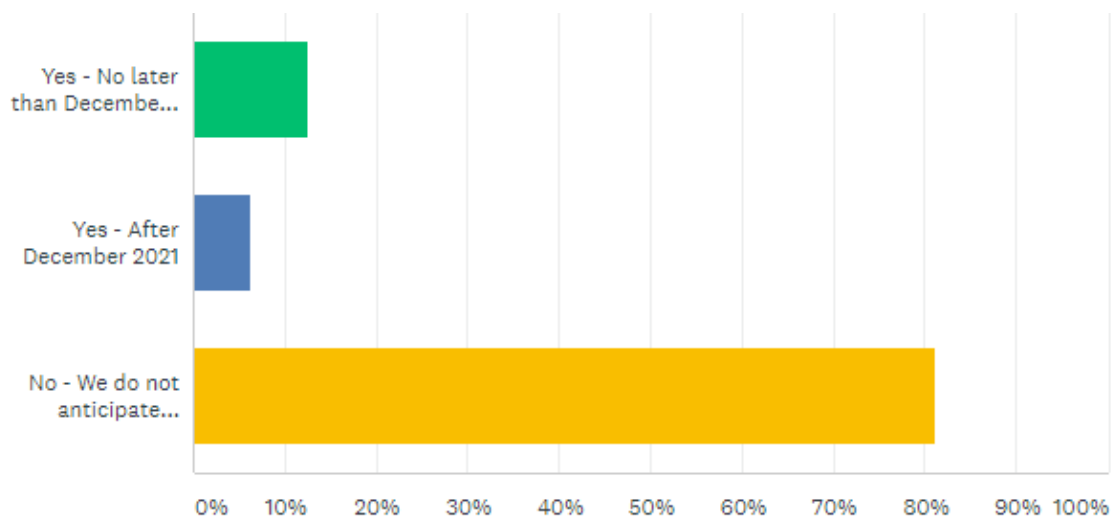
No = 7 (27%)

Yes, private patients = 18 (69%)

Yes, NHS patients = 4 (15%)

Note: percentages exceed 100 as some practices are accepting both NHS and private patients

2 If you are not accepting new patients at present, when do you anticipate doing so?

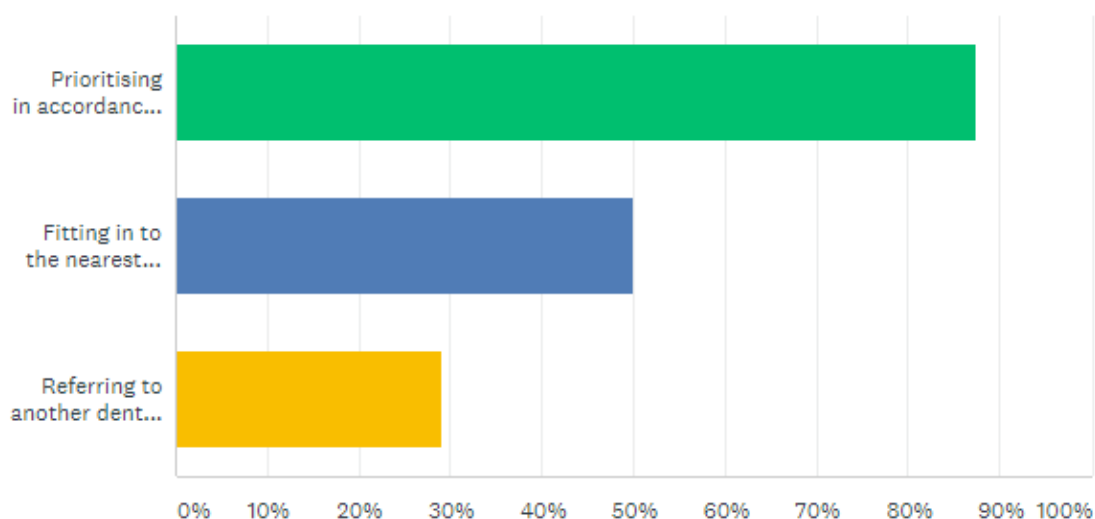


Yes, no later than December 2021 = 2

Yes, after December 2021 = 1

No, we do not anticipate accepting NHS patients = 13

3 How are you dealing with emergency patients?

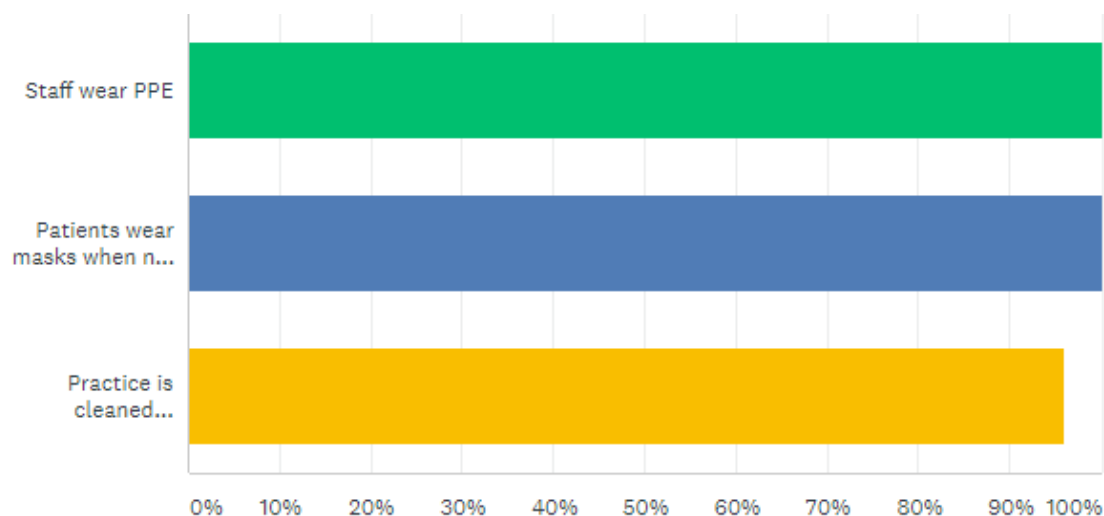


Prioritising in accordance with need = 21

Fitting in to the nearest available appointment slot = 12

Referring to another dental services = 7

4 What precautions are you taking when patients attend?

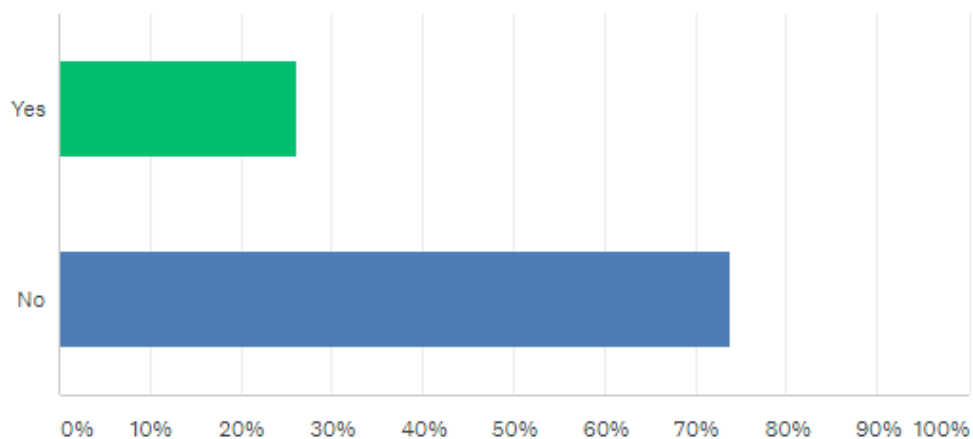


Staff wear PPE = 25

Patients wear masks when not undergoing treatment = 25

Practice is cleaned thoroughly between patients = 24

5 Do you make a charge to patients for use of PPE?



Yes = 6

No = 17

Participation in Healthwatch Havering

Local people who have time to spare are welcome to join us as volunteers. We need both people who work in health or social care services, and those who are simply interested in getting the best possible health and social care services for the people of Havering.

Our aim is to develop wide, comprehensive and inclusive involvement in Healthwatch Havering, to allow every individual and organisation of the Havering Community to have a role and a voice at a level they feel appropriate to their personal circumstances.

We are looking for:

Members

This is the key working role. For some, this role will provide an opportunity to help improve an area of health and social care where they, their families or friends have experienced problems or difficulties. Very often a life experience has encouraged people to think about giving something back to the local community or simply personal circumstances now allow individuals to have time to develop themselves. This role will enable people to extend their networks, and can help prepare for college, university or a change in the working life. There is no need for any prior experience in health or social care for this role.

The role provides the face to face contact with the community, listening, helping, signposting, providing advice. It also is part of ensuring the most isolated people within our community have a voice.

Some Members may wish to become **Specialists**, developing and using expertise in a particular area of social care or health services.

Friends Network

Participation in the Healthwatch Havering Friends Network is open to every citizen and organisation that lives or operates within the London Borough of Havering. The Friends Network enables its members to be kept informed of developments in the health and social care system in Havering, to find out about Healthwatch activities and to participate in surveys and events

Interested? Want to know more?



Call us on **01708 303 300**

email **enquiries@healthwatchhavering.co.uk**

To join the Healthwatch Havering Friends Network,
[click here](#) or contact us as above



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